Tech Success: Weblogs help Justice take a bite out of crime

Washington Technology, July 23, 2003 By JOAB JACKSON Integrators could use Traction software to juggle several projects Often, Justice Department analysts and law enforcement officials share what they know about narcotics dealers and terrorists by trading e-mails. But this informal information exchange can be messy: E-mail servers quickly fill up with duplicate copies sent to multiple recipients. No one is usually tasked with keeping a central repository of all the documents and the comments they generate.

So one regional office of the Justice Department has put a Weblog onto its intranet for people to share this information in one central location. Weblogs are Web pages where links or short comments are posted. Because they are easier to update than static Web pages, new information is posted more frequently. Now, agents can use a Web browser to peruse and comment on what others have posted or add information themselves.

Like the Justice Department, clients of systems integrators could use Weblogs as a way to post news and even work with others on projects, eliminating the need for expensive collaboration software, such as IBM Corp's Lotus Notes, according to Greg Lloyd, president of Traction Software Inc. The Providence, R.I.-based company supplied the Weblog software to the Justice Department's program office.

Weblogs have been a staple on the Internet for online diaries or news sites, and now they are being used more in the workplace. More than 80 percent of e-mail sent out in many organizations is broadcast e-mail, meaning it's sent to multiple recipients, Lloyd said. All that duplication can be eliminated by posting a notice in one spot.

Integrators also can use Weblogs as an internal tool to keep track of multiple projects.

"If a systems integrator participates in 12 different Navy projects, news from all the program offices can be captured on one page," Lloyd said.

Traction's enterprise Weblog software, called TeamPage, is unique in that it allows users to set up a portal for viewing several Weblogs from one page.

Traction's server-based enterprise software ranges in price from $5,000 per server to $10,000 per server plus $125 per account, depending on features. A single user versions runs for about $250.

For Karen Aumond, assistant director of the Justice Department's Western States Information Network, Weblogs answered many needs for her office.

The Western States Information Network is one of six regional intelligence systems opened by the Justice Department to share information between its officials, local law enforcement agencies and other federal agencies. The office covers 1,200 local law enforcement agencies in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington.

According to Aumond, Weblogs significantly reduce e-mail traffic.

"Everyone in our agency was getting the same e-mail, even if it didn't pertain to what they were doing," Aumond said from her Sacramento, Calif., office. Participants would often send comments back and forth about the report,

which was useful information. But it was rarely captured for future use, as the agency's e-mail system automatically deleted old e-mails.

By using a Weblog, that copy is posted once, saving space on the e-mail server. Everyone's comments are also saved in one place.

"Now, rather than every one of the managers keeping the same material on their computers, we designate one person to be in charge of each project," Aumond said. The centralized repository also allows agents to access material while they're away from the office.

Traction also offers users the ability to search through old Weblog posts. An analyst needing to produce a report on drug traffic in the last quarter can go back and compile all the items of interest through a simple search.

The software can also send out daily digests for people too busy to check into the sites. Password security assures that only appropriate people view the material.

"It's really a good way for a manager to keep in touch with what is going on," Aumond said.

Founded in 1986, Traction Software received funding from In-Q-Tel, the Central Intelligence Agency's investment arm. The company now has six employees, Lloyd said. Although the company has been selling software since 2000, it has only recently looked to the integrator community as a possible market, where it pitches its product as a low-cost way to manage several projects and keep up on competitive intelligence. The company also has sold copies of the software to intelligence agencies, such as the CIA.

In the case of the Justice Department, Traction's software was installed earlier this year on an underused server. The Weblogs are now used in multiple places around the network, Aumond said. Analysts post reports, research and other materials for law enforcement officials to read. Justice Department personnel respond to inquiries posted by outside law enforcement agencies. In-house system personnel use a Weblog to create polices and procedures for their programs.

"We've trained everyone on one part of it, and now everyone is discovering new uses for it," Aumond said. "Everybody that looks at it thinks of a new application."

If you have an innovative solution that you recently installed in a government agency, contact Staff Writer Joab Jackson at *jjackson@postnewsweektech.com*.

Greg Lloyd, president of traction Software Inc.

(Washington Technology Photo by Chee-Heng Yeong)

IT solutions in action

Agency: Justice Department

Partners: Traction Software Inc., Providence, R.I.

Web address: *http://www.tractionsoftware.com*

Goal: The Justice Department wanted agents from its regional offices, local law enforcement offices and other federal agencies to share drug and terrorist-related information they collect and analyze.

Obstacle: Reports, articles and other information were frequently circulated by e-mail. Duplicates of documents sent to many people jammed up e-mails servers and were deleted after a set period of time -- even if they were still needed.

Solution: The network's offices implemented an enterprise Weblog software from Traction Software that allows each project manager to create a Web page, or a Weblog, where updates and analysis can be easily posted. Participants can check into the Weblog to read the latest developments.

Payoff: Project participants now have a central repository they can search to find information. Weblogs can be accessed on the road through wireless mobile devices, and update summaries can be sent automatically to participants by e-mail.

From *http://www.washingtontechnology.com*, see *original source*.

1 article, 25 paragraphs, 6 comments